

# The San Diego Union-Tribune.

## **GOP school plan**

SACRAMENTO -- As a big state budget gap widens, Republican legislators sketched a plan today to keep school funding at about the current level next year without raising taxes.

Democrats have been using deep school cuts proposed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as the poster child of their drive for a tax increase to help close the big budget shortfall. The governor today pegged that shortfall at more than \$10 billion.

"Quality education is a priority for Republicans and always has been," said Assembly Republican Leader Mike Villines of Clovis, who appeared at a news conference with Senate Minority Leader Dave Cogdill, R-Modesto.

"Often times Republicans seem to get labeled as if they are not pro-education," said Villines.

The Republican leaders acknowledged that their no-tax plan to protect schools would require deeper cuts in health, social services and other parts of the state budget. The plan would give schools an estimated \$600 million to \$700 million in windfall gasoline sales tax revenue.

Democrats want increased funding for schools next year, not the basic freeze advocated by Republicans. The GOP plan would require some maneuvering to lower the Proposition 98 school-funding guarantee.

Republicans said their plan must be accompanied by reforms that cut state red tape and give school districts more choice in the spending of their money. They urged prompt action before the new fiscal year begins July 1.

The Republican plan, outlined only in the broadest of terms, may not add up. It's based on revenue estimates made in January. As the economy has weakened since then, the shortfall is believed to have grown by several billion dollars.

A Democratic budget writer said the Republican plan is "premature." Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will have updated revenue and spending estimates when he delivers a revised budget proposal on May 14.

